INTER CAETERA

(Pope Alexander VI, issued May 4, 1493)

Alexander, bishop, servant of the servants of God, to the illustrious sovereigns, our very dear son in Christ Ferdinand, king, and our very dear daughter in Christ Isabella, queen of Castile, Leon, Aragon, and Granada, health and apostolic benediction.

Among other works well pleasing to the Divine Majesty and cherished of our heart, this assuredly ranks highest, that in our times especially the Catholic faith and the Christian religion be exalted and be everywhere increased and spread, that the health of souls be cared for, and that barbarous nations be overthrown and brought to the faith itself.

Therefore, inasmuch as by the favor of Divine clemency, we have been set over the government of the said faith that we may seek and pursue these things with all our might, we have learned that you, who for a long time had intended to seek out and discover certain islands and mainlands remote and unknown and not hitherto discovered by others, to the end that you might bring to the worship of our Redeemer and the profession of the Catholic faith their residents and inhabitants, with the wish to accomplish this and to make it known in your hearts, did dispatch our beloved son Christopher Columbus, under your orders, to the said parts as your captain general; and that he finally discovered certain very remote islands and even mainlands that had not hitherto been discovered by others.

The inhabitants thereof dwell in these islands and lands, and **they believe in one God, the Creator in heaven; and we are informed that they are disposed to embrace the Catholic faith and be trained in good morals.** It is hoped that, by the Lord's will, if you should instruct them, they will be brought to the faith in short time.

Therefore we, of our own accord, not at your instance nor the request of anyone else, but of our own mere motion and certain knowledge, give, grant, and assign to you and your heirs and successors, kings of Castile and Leon, forever, together with all their dominions, cities, camps, places, and villages, and all rights, jurisdictions, and appurtenances, all islands and mainlands found and to be found, discovered and to be discovered towards the west and the south, by drawing and establishing a line from the Arctic pole, namely the north, to the Antarctic pole, namely the south—no matter whether the said mainlands and islands are found and to be found in the direction of India or toward any other quarter whatsoever—the said line to be distant one hundred leagues towards the west and south from any of the islands commonly known as the Azores and Cape Verde.

And we make, appoint, and constitute you and your said heirs and successors lords of them with full and free power, authority, and jurisdiction of every kind, with this proviso, however, that none of the islands and mainlands found and to be found, discovered and to be discovered, beyond that said line toward the west and south, be in the actual possession of any Christian king or prince up to the present day.

Furthermore, by the authority of Almighty God conferred upon us in blessed Peter and of the vicarship of Jesus Christ which we hold on earth, we make, appoint, and decree that from now on the said islands and mainlands found and to be found, discovered and to be discovered, beyond that said line toward the west and south, be yours and your heirs and successors' forever, with full authority and jurisdiction.

We furthermore command you, in virtue of holy obedience, to send to the said mainlands and islands upright and God-fearing men, learned, skilled, and experienced, in order to instruct the aforesaid inhabitants and residents in the Catholic faith and train them in good morals, and we ordain that you are to do so.

We moreover strictly command all persons of whatsoever rank, even imperial and royal, or of whatsoever dignity, state, or condition, under pain of excommunication latae sententiae to be incurred ipso facto if they act to the contrary, that without your special license or that of your said heirs and successors, no one is to dare to go to the said islands or mainlands found and to be found, discovered and to be discovered, toward the west and south, for the purpose of trade or any other reason, under penalty of excommunication and loss of vessels and goods.

Let no one therefore infringe or with rash boldness contravene this our gift, grant, assignment, constitution, deputation, decree, mandate, prohibition, and will. Should anyone presume to attempt this, be it known that he will incur the wrath of Almighty God and of the blessed apostles Peter and Paul.

Given at Rome, at St. Peter's, on the fourth day of May in the year of the Incarnation of our Lord one thousand four hundred and ninety-three, the first year of our pontificate.